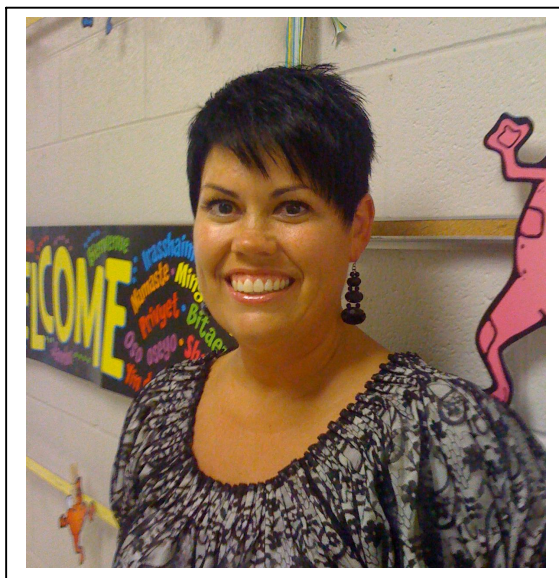


# Become A Special Educator In Tennessee

## Feature Story



**Student: Lezlie Shelton**

**Major: Special Education  
Lambuth University  
Jackson, TN**

When my daughter was three years old, she was diagnosed with the disability known as autism. At that time, I had a very limited understanding of the issues that she and our family would deal with on a day-to-day basis. I was able to obtain employment as a substitute teacher in the same school where my daughter attended. While she was learning to socialize and communicate, I was discovering how to master instruction with a wide range of intelligences and teach students with different learning styles. Needless to say, my daughter and I had a lot to learn and acquire!

After three years of substitute teaching and serving under the guidance of an administrator who believed in my abilities and potential, I realized that I wanted to become an educator who served students with disabilities. But there were critical questions: Where do I start? At age 41, will I be able to enroll and successfully complete the college level coursework? And most importantly, where will I receive the funding for tuition?

I discovered that Tennessee sponsored a program called **BASE-TN** (**B**ecome **A** **S**pecial **E**ducator in **TN**) that provided financial support for eligible individuals who returned to school to earn a teacher license in special education and subsequently teach special education in the Tennessee schools. I researched the BASE-TN Program online ([www.k12.tn.us/BASE-TN](http://www.k12.tn.us/BASE-TN)). After careful consideration – and with some apprehension – I completed the application seeking BASE-TN support. I remember the day I was accepted into the program. Yes, I cried! Incredibly, I was given an opportunity of a lifetime by the state of Tennessee. Through the BASE-TN Teaching Program, I was able to acquire financial support. I enrolled as a student at Lambuth University in Jackson, Tennessee and began completing courses leading to licensure in Special Education.

Lambuth University outlined an individualized Plan of Study for me. The professional atmosphere and the faculty's willingness to lend support with coursework and preparation for the state exams were immeasurable. After one year of matriculation, I had completed all the required courses except student teaching/internship. At that time, I was given an option: (1) satisfy student teaching/internship requirements by serving as the teacher of record for two years in a special education classroom after applying for and receiving an alternative teacher license, or (2) successfully student teach for one-semester within a school system. I opted to apply for the Alternative License and began teaching immediately. I am proud to say, I will be able to apply for full teacher licensure at the end of the 2009-2010 academic year.

After 20 years of working in a corporate setting, I now have the distinct privilege of working with students with special needs in a successful school district in West Tennessee. I will always be grateful to "**BASE-TN**," this extraordinary program that gave me an opportunity for a new and beautiful beginning that has enabled me to provide a different level of assistance and understanding of my own daughter's educational needs as well as prepare for years of working with other Tennessee children with disabilities.